

Official Says King Death, Officer's Move Unrelated

MEMPHIS (AP) — The man who was police director when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated here says it is ridiculous to think there is any connection between King's death and the removal of a black policeman among those assigned to guard the civil rights leader.

Former Fire and Police Director Frank Holloman said the policeman was sent home from guard duty because his life had been threatened.

The U.S. House of Representatives voted Friday to reopen the investigation into the 1968 slaying, based on new information that reportedly includes the removal of the black policeman and two black firemen from their posts shortly before King was shot.

The black officer was Sgt. Edward E. Redditt, who now works for the city's community development office.

At 4 p.m. on April 4, 1968, Holloman ordered Redditt off the detail after reports there was a "contract" out on the detective's life.

Redditt and Lt. E.H. Arkin Jr. were sitting in a police cruiser in front of Redditt's home when word of the assassination came over the police radio at 6:01 p.m.

"As I look back now, it didn't bother me then. It bothered me later," Redditt said Friday as he recalled that night. "I was so busy I didn't think about it. It bothers me now."

Holloman said that sending Redditt home had no significance other than to protect the policeman's life.

"He had been threatened and we took it upon ourselves to move him and his family to

a safe place," said Holloman, now executive director of Future Memphis, Inc. "It is ridiculous to suggest that this had anything to do with King's death."

Redditt said he protested his removal from the detail guarding King, but he added that he has no reason to question Holloman's motives.

Before coming to Memphis, Holloman spent 25 years with the FBI, where his career included a stint as an inspector in the office of then-Director J. Edgar Hoover.

King, who had come to Memphis to offer support to striking garbage workers, was shot and killed on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, a half-block from Main St.

James Earl Ray was arrested and pleaded guilty to the crime and currently is serving a 99-year term at the state prison in Nashville.

Holloman said he had "no recollection" about the transfer of the firemen and does not know who gave the order to move them.

"The fire department had no role whatsoever in security or police work," he said. "I don't see how this could have any bearing on King's death."

Floyd Newsum is one of the two black firemen who said they were transferred from Fire Station No. 2 the night before King's death. The station is about a block from the Lorraine Motel.

Newsum said he had told his story repeatedly and that details of his move were published shortly after the assassination.

Like Redditt, however, Newsum says he was never interviewed by the FBI or any other law enforcement agencies investigating the assassination.

(Milled)

9-1976